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SUBJECT: EAP DAS CHRISTENSEN VISIT TO CHENGDU: LOCAL SCHOLAR ON  
CHALLENGES FACING TIBETAN AREAS

REF: A) 07 CHENGDU 239 B) 07 CHENGDU 231

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CLASSIFIED BY: James A. Boughner, Consul General, U.S. Consulate  
General, Chengdu.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) Summary: During a recent meeting in Chengdu with EAP DAS Christensen, noted Sichuan-Tibetan scholar Tsering Dhudrup frankly shared his concerns on the economic and political challenges faced by ethnic Tibetans in China. He complained that assistance funds directed by the central government to "Help Tibet" often end up being of more benefit to Han Chinese and warned the new Qinghai-Tibet railway will likely have a negative impact on Tibetan culture. Central government authorities have directed the political crackdown that has occurred in western Sichuan's Ganzi Prefecture following summer disturbances. Despite his criticisms of government policies, Tsering Dhudrup styles himself a "loyal ethnic cadre" and has

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been able to publish his writings in China. End Summary.

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"Help Tibet" Cadres Not Much Help, Most Aid Money Makes a Quick U-Turn  
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2. (C) On January 20, East Asian Affairs Bureau Deputy Assistant Secretary Thomas Christensen met with Tsering Dhudrup, a noted

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local scholar on Tibetan issues. CG, Congenoff, and Consulate Tibetan FSN also participated in the meeting. Tsering Dhudrup stressed that Tibetans need technical training and management skills if they are to be able to compete with Chinese migrants in traditionally ethnic Tibetan areas. Most if not all "Help Tibet" cadres (see ref a) sent from inland China to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) are originally low ranking government officials. They get bumped up a grade and are given a handsome supplement to their salary for working in the TAR. Such cadres do not understand Tibetan language and customs. However, some ethnic Tibetan officials think such cadres are of some use since they can channel investment from their home areas. Relationships developed with home province companies are reinforced by the practice of tied aid so that firms providing the assistance get the development contracts.

13. (C) Tsering Dhudrup estimated that 80% of government assistance funds to Tibetan areas finds its way back to inland China since there are few Tibetans who have the requisite training in science and engineering needed to replace the Han Chinese who carry out most development projects. Han Chinese are in charge of all big construction projects in the region. They often do not hire local ethnic Tibetan workers or pay them only minimal wages. Ethnic Tibetans often lack requisite technical skills and must settle for poorly paid manual labor. Han migration into Tibetan areas is also rapidly increasing. Most Han are migrant laborers, business people, cadres or students. A traditional and cultural dislike of commerce as a form of "exploitation," is partly responsible for the overall lack of business acumen among many Tibetans.

14. (SBU) What Tibetan areas need most, Tsering Dhudrup continued, are vocational schools to provide training in science and education. More ethnic Tibetan scientists and engineers are needed if development work is actually to be done by Tibetans. Currently, there are very few Tibetans qualified in science and engineering anywhere in China. Foreign assistance to Tibetan areas that focuses on training ethnic Tibetans in science and technology would be very helpful. Heavy industrial development would not be good for Tibetan areas due to the fragile ecology and environment. Developing ecotourism and protecting Tibetan culture, however, would not only help Tibetans, but also be of value to other peoples and nations.

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The Train and Economic Development  
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15. (C) Although the Qinghai-Tibet railway is good for China as a whole and can provide more material things to Tibetans in the TAR, it will likely prove harmful to Tibetan culture as it helps to strip away the traditional isolation that has protected Tibet. Tsering Dhudrup referred to the new railway as creating both "spiritual and cultural pollution." Although recently asked to write an article lauding the coming of the railroad, he refused. Eventually, he was permitted to write an article that discussed both the downside of the coming of the railroad for the preservation of Tibet's traditional culture as well as the

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benefits of economic development.

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Ganzi Prefecture Problems  
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16. (C) According to Tsering Dhudrup, Tibetan areas (the TAR plus neighboring prefectures in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan -- where more than half of China's ethnic Tibetans live) have been liberalizing economically, but politically remain closed and backward. For example, most ethnic Tibetans view the calling for a return of the Dalai Lama by a nomad in western Sichuan's Ganzi Prefecture during a public gathering on August 1 (see ref b) to have been a perfectly legitimate and understandable action. Government authorities, however, overreacted and used the "Litang August 1 Incident" as a pretext to intensify efforts to crack down on local dissidents. According to Tsering Dhudrup, current Ganzi Prefecture Party Secretary Liu Daoping is himself a "reasonable man," but has no choice but to implement policies dictated at a high level in Beijing. (Note: Tsering Dhudrup, who currently lives in the Ganzi Prefecture capital of Kangding, is known to have served as an adviser to Liu Daoping. End note).

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Background on Tsering Dhudrup  
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17. (SBU) Tsering Dhudrup's nominal position as a local party cadre belies the influence his political and historical writings may have sometimes had on government authorities. In 1995, the

Communist Party published a series of his essays (for distribution only to Party members) in a Chinese/Tibetan bilingual edition entitled "My Cherished Desire" (Chinese: Wo de Xinyuan; Tibetan: bdag gi re smon). Writing as a "loyal ethnic cadre" who sought to improve the Party's effectiveness in Tibetan areas, Tsering Dhudrup offered trenchant criticisms that echoed -- and foreshadowed -- overseas NGOs' concerns about Chinese government policies.

¶8. (SBU) In "My Cherished Desire," Tsering Dhudrup attacked what he referred to as "Han Chauvinism," questioned ethnic cadres' understanding of and commitment to constitutional guarantees of autonomy, advocated better selection and training of Tibetan officials, decried the erosion of Tibetan language skills, and called for the elevation of the traditional Tibetan region of Kham (west Sichuan, east TAR, northwest Yunnan) to provincial status. In his most influential essay, "Reasons for and Responses to Instability in Tibetan Areas," written in 1986, Tsering Dhudrup articulated his theory that a strategy of

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accelerated investment and targeted development could dampen separatist enthusiasm among ordinary Tibetans. The Communist Party's decision to publish this essay in the mid-1990s, immediately before launching just such a policy, suggests that Tsering Dhudrup's ideas may have had an impact on government

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policy.

¶9. (SBU) Tsering Dhudrup remains an influential figure among ethnic Tibetan cadres. His recent, monumental Chinese-language history of Tibet, Zangzu Tongshi -- Jixiang Baoping, reportedly aroused the ire of officials in the neighboring Tibet Autonomous Region for what was regarded as a less than politically correct treatment of the years 1913-1959.

¶10. (U) This cable was cleared by DAS Christensen.  
BOUGHNER